

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns in a dark brown color, framing the central text.

**let's hear it for  
the boy(s)**

**Kandakicksass**

## let's hear it for the boy(s) by Kandakicksass

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**Summary:**

In which Richie and Eddie go to different colleges, and all of their friends are curious about their unnamed significant others - right up until those significant others come to visit and everyone is both shocked and confused.

Aka, Tumblr user starstruck-stargazing's amazing idea, which I have gleefully expanded into a fic.

## let's hear it for the boy(s)

### Author's Note:

Apparently all my IT fics have to be written in present tense. Sorry? I wrote this on mobile as well, so please don't hate me for any weird Google docs-to-a03 weirdness or typos.

This is also pretty ambiguous in terms of the universe - it's set during the movie timeline, so it's around 1995, but the events of the movie don't come up so this could be a no-pennywise!au or just a time skip college fic.

Also this idea came from the BRILLIANT starstruck-stargazing on Tumblr, who graciously let me run away with their college!Reddie idea. Thank you thank you; I had loads of fun with this. ♡ I'd hyperlink the post but idk how to hyperlink in author's notes. Sorry I'm trash, lmao.

\*\*\*(Eddie's Campus)\*\*\*

Delany feels pretty confident in saying that he's Eddie Kaspbrak's best friend. They've roomed together for a year and a half now, and they plan to room together for junior year, too, assuming they don't just get an apartment off campus. Eddie's pretty cagey about his past sometimes, but Delany knows the important things, like that his mom made him think he was sick since he could understand words and that he's got six good friends from his hometown that he grew up alongside and still keeps in touch with.

Maybe this is why he's so shocked when they're at a party one night and during a game of Truth or Dare (they're sophomores, not graduate students; let them have their stupid party games) Eddie casually answers "who would you date here?" with "I mean, I'm taken, so." He looks so happy when he says it, chest puffing up in pride, and they all stare at him - Delany, and their three other friends, Melissa, Jane, and Daniel. So does the rest of the sophomore

and junior partygoers playing with them, because they all know Eddie and like him well enough, and they'd *know* if he was dating someone, wouldn't they?

Eddie is oblivious to their scrutiny - he's kind of a mess, actually, with flushed cherry-colored cheeks and his curls messy from all the times he's run his fingers through them tonight.

"You're taken," Melissa repeats, eyes huge and round. She looks like her whole world has been rocked.

"Y-yeah," he hiccups, laughing a little. "Have been for *ages*."

"Where is this girlfriend?" Delany asks, because how could he not know this?

Eddie hums. "My partner goes to school three or four hours from here." He shrugs, like it's not a big deal. "We make it work, and we're really happy, so."

He doesn't really answer any more questions about this girl, and Delany gets it - Eddie is a really private guy and always has been. Because he respects that, he doesn't question him further and makes everyone else settle down, but the question circles in the back of his mind.

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Respecting Eddie's not wanting to talk too much about it doesn't mean that he and the others don't sometimes debate amongst themselves what Eddie's girlfriend is probably like.

"He's such a sweet guy," Melissa says. "She's probably a lot like him, right? Probably waiting for marriage, straight As... did they go to highschool together?" She turns toward Delany, but he doesn't know and he shrugs.

"Eddie won't even give me a name," he snorts. "How am I supposed to know? I'm pretty sure they have known each other for a long time, though."

Daniel, who's got a Stephen King novel open on the table and is

giving it cursory glances during breaks in conversation, hums thoughtfully. "They probably did go to highschool together - I mean, can you see Eddie dating someone he doesn't know inside and out? He's so private, it'd have to be someone he really trusts and has known a *long* time."

"You're right," Melissa agrees. "He wouldn't be the kind of guy who'd just jump into it." Next to her, Jane nods vehemently.

"I just wanna know," she says glumly. "I mean, we've been friends for like a year now. It's weird we've never met her."

"She doesn't go here," Delany points out. "So we wouldn't *meet* her anyway, probably. Maybe she doesn't have a car, and can't drive to visit. Eddie doesn't even have a car yet."

"That's because Sonia drives him everywhere he needs to go off campus," Jane says with a roll of the eyes. "But then again, if she's anything like the upright, perfect girl I'm picturing, she's probably got crazy overprotective parents, too. She's probably super Christian and isn't allowed to kiss before their wedding day."

Delany opens his mouth to say something, but then he spots Eddie approaching over Daniel's shoulder and morphs his mouth into a smile instead. "Hey, Eddie," he calls pointedly, and Melissa ducks her head to snort into her milkshake.

Eddie's got his headphones half on, and he's bopping along to something - he's the kind of person who's pretty much always cheerful, even if he hides it by being a notorious nag. Just looking at him, it's quite obvious why they all flock to him. He's got such a bright smile and he always dresses nice, matching jeans or khakis with colorful polo shirts and soft sweaters. He wears braided leather bracelets and has soft, curly brown hair.

Melissa usually describes him as "huggable," and she's not wrong.

"Hi, guys," he says back, scooting into the seat next to Daniel. He's got a huge grin on his face, like something's going very, very right in his life. It makes his nose wrinkle and his freckles shift. His hair is a mess from the wind outside, but other than that he's well put

together as always. After he sits, he shuffles forward to the edge of his seat and pulls his knapsack off his back, setting it down next to the table. "You would not *believe* the day I've had."

"Tell us about it, sugar," Jane says, leaning back comfortably.

Eddie proceeds to give them a rundown of the full-on fight that took place in his American Renaissance Lit class, and the topic of his significant other drifts to the back of their minds.

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Delany asks one night, when Eddie's curled up in bed with his sociology book, what his significant other is like. He's pretty sure Eddie doesn't like the word *girlfriend*, and tries not to use it - Eddie's always saying *partner* or *significant other* himself. Delany thinks it's probably because their relationship is close to marriage; it's not casual anymore, and girlfriend sounds silly when she might as well be his fiancée. Eddie has said they're really serious before, after all.

"What's your S.O. like?" he braves, watching Eddie turn pages.

There's no hesitation. "Wonderful," he says in a warm voice, without even looking up, and Delany doesn't question him further. He just feels good for his friend, knowing that he's really in love and has a good thing going on.

"You know, we'd like to meet her," he says gently. "We love you, dude; if she makes you happy, we'd like her, too."

Eddie flushes a little, and he grins crookedly over at him. "I'll, erm. I'll keep it in mind. It's just a weird situation, with the distance and everything."

Delany nods, satisfied. "Of course. I get that; I'm just saying. If she ever wants to visit, I could clear out and stay with Danny for a week or so, give you some space." Eddie flushes darker, and Delany adds "she can have my bed" because Eddie's clearly having a conniption about the idea of sleeping with her.

"Thanks, man," he chokes, but his eyes are still really bright, so Delany doesn't think he messed it up too badly.

It all comes to a head when Eddie plops down onto the couch one day while they're all chilling in the recreation center. It's got a lot of padded armchairs and long couches, and they always claim the corner for themselves.

"So," he says, breathless. His face is all lit up in delight. "You guys can stop gossiping about my significant other when I'm not around now. You're gonna get to meet them."

Melissa, Jane, and Delany go red. Daniel doesn't look fazed, but when Eddie raises an eyebrow at him, he looks away awkwardly. Eddie rolls his eyes. "Your partner's coming to visit?" Delany asks, coughing self-consciously, and Eddie seems to forget about teasing them. Instead, he beams and nods. "I'm glad, man! Need me to clear out of our room? When?"

Eddie hurries to agree, his cheeks pinking, but it's still a happy flush. "The twenty-third of this month through the thirtieth." He bounces a little. "I'm excited. We haven't seen each other since summer and I miss them."

Melissa and Delany share a glance at the pronoun usage, wondering at each other via eyebrow-wiggles, but neither of them say anything about it.

"What're they like?" Melissa asks then, going with the pronoun without questioning it, and Eddie does the same happy wiggle he'd done a second ago.

"Wonderful," he says, ever the doting boyfriend, and Jane aw s a little to herself. "I mean," he continues, coughing a little. "They're, uh. Really something else. Really... lively. You'll like them, I'm sure." His eyes say *I hope so* , and Delany warms, reaching over to pat him on the shoulder.

"We'll love them," Jane assures him, as encouraging as can be. "After all, they're dating you, so they've got good taste." She winks and Eddie preens a little. They let the conversation go, but Delany marks the date in his calendar when he gets home and makes plans with the

others to wait outside with Eddie when his partner is meant to show up.

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They're waiting for this perfect girl a sunny day two weeks later. Eddie's all gussied up - his curls have been carefully brushed to the side, slicked a little to make them stay in place, and his shirt and shorts are perfectly pressed. There's even a crease down the fronts of his thighs. The collar of his salmon-colored polo is perfectly arranged, and Eddie swings his feet under the bench they're sitting on while they wait, looking like a church advertisement for a youth group.

Delany admits that he's got a particular visual in his head of how this adventure is going to go. She'll show up, in some nice-but-not-too-nice car, and when she gets out she'll be in a nice skirt and a floral blouse or something like that. Eddie will go forward and take her hand before kissing her cheek, and then he'll bring her forward and introduce her politely with his hand entwined with hers. It's all very cinematic in his head, he'll admit.

He also considers that Eddie's significant other could be a boy, or someone in-between, but that mental image is just as clean cut. The only difference is that instead of a skirt and floral shirt, Delaney's new imagined significant other for Eddie is pretty much dressed the same way Eddie himself is.

Suffice it to say, when a beaten-up blue truck comes groaning up to the curb several yards away, the first thing he does is trade confused looks with Melissa, Jane, and Daniel, who all look as alarmed as he is. Between him and Melissa, Eddie's practically vibrating.

They can't see properly into the truck, but the drivers' side door opens almost immediately and a lanky boy with erratic, chin-length black curls comes around the front. Delany wonders if he's maybe a friend who'd agreed to drive Eddie's partner, because he doesn't look anything like the clean-cut kid he's been imagining. He's got a faded Metallica shirt on and ripped black jeans that cling to his legs like a second skin. His converse are at least five years old and *filthy*. One pair is actually untied, and Delany wonders if he's gonna trip himself. He doesn't, but it doesn't make the overall image any less bizarre.



He's pretty enough, Delany supposes, but he's covered in freckles - even more than Eddie is in the summer - and he's got these huge glasses on his face that have been taped back together more than once.

"EDS!" the kid yells in their direction, beaming. Eddie scrambles to his feet. "EDS *FUCKING* KASPBRAK! HAVE I MISSED *YOU* !" He starts waving wildly, but Eddie's already running over to him.

"Don't fucking call me that," Delany hears Eddie huff, but he sounds so *happy*. To the shock of literally everyone present except Eddie and the mystery guy themselves, Eddie launches himself at the kid and kisses him hard.

"What is happening right now," Melissa says, amazed. It's not really question.

"Erm." Jane cocks her head. "Are they just gonna keep making out on the street?"

It's really not behavior Delany would expect of Eddie, but they are kind of getting hot and heavy - Eddie's pushed the kid up against the side of his truck and he's got his hands framing the kid's freckled cheeks. He's pretty sure one of the other guy's hands is on Eddie's ass, though the angle makes it hard to tell. He's never seen Eddie kiss anyone, let alone with the amount of tongue he's got shoved into the new guy's mouth, but he's also never seen Eddie be so unrestrained except for when he's dancing to eighties music, so he's inclined to smile at them instead of judge.

"Are you gonna introduce us?" he calls over, snorting, and after a beat, Eddie closes the kiss off with one last little peck to the guy's lips and then looks over at them sheepishly. Taking the guy's hand, he leads him over to where all four of his friends are standing with expressions ranging from disbelief to amusement. Daniel particularly looks like he's about to laugh.

"So," Eddie coughs. "This is Richie."

"Hi!" Richie greets them happily. "I'm his boytoy."

Eddie rolls his eyes, but he leans into Richie's side a little bit more and his mouth is still red from their impromptu makeout session, so the effect is lost. "We grew up together, and we got together in high school," Eddie explains. "I kind of hate him but I've put up with him for this long, so I might as well keep him around." He shrugs, and then eyes them with hesitation in his eyes, like he thinks they're going to judge him.

Considering the fact that Eddie had never mentioned that he liked boys, Delany can kind of get that, especially considering his careful avoidance of male pronouns when he'd brought it up a couple weeks ago and every time since.

"It's good to meet you, man," Delany says, and Richie grins at him. He's pretty sure he's never see this guy *not* smiling so far.

"Yeah," Jane says, quickly warming. "It's really nice to meet you. I mean, I definitely thought you'd be in a skirt and way less punk rock, but..." She laughs, and so does Richie, who doesn't look offended in the slightest.

"I'd totally rock a skirt," he says agreeably. "Eddie would probably get off on it, too - you interested b- *abe*?" The word ends on a yelp as an exasperated Eddie punches in the shoulder and finally stops clinging to him. "Ow! Babe!"

"It's been two minutes and you're already pissing me off," Eddie says with another eye roll. "It's amazing. How do you do it?"

Delany is kind of alarmed, wondering if their relationship is about to dissolve right before his eyes, but Richie just laughs and pulls him back, kissing his forehead happily.

"It's a talent," he sighs. "I *have* missed you, fuck."

Trying to keep his expression irritated and failing, a tiny little reluctant smile curves Eddie's lips upward. "I missed you too." Then he looks over at the rest of them, flushing a little. "You guys wanna go for an early dinner? Get to know this idiot?" He says idiot, but his hands are on Richie's hips, the right one slipping under his shirt to grasp at warm skin.

"Sounds good," Daniel says, still a little dubious, but he looks happy on Eddie's behalf, and they all agree in short order. They all start walking toward the pizza place they frequent, and pretend they don't notice that Eddie and Richie are swinging their entwined hands.

It didn't make sense at first, Delany thinks, but he kind of gets it. They're like puzzle pieces. With a smile quirked his lips, he follows them down the street.

\*\*\* (Richie's Campus) \*\*\*

Richie's sort of a household name on campus. He's part of the team that runs the radio station at the school and he's had all sorts of antics go regionally famous. He's the kid that streaks through the quad on a dare and accidentally burns down part of the kitchen trying to make pancakes. He's smart as hell, but also *dumb as hell*, and consequently, everyone knows the name Richie Tozier.

He's got some good friends - Veronica, Lane, and Christian, whose name is incredibly ironic considering that his hair is dyed four colors and he's got a double snakebite. The rest of them are pretty normal - Richie excluded - but there's a certain vibe they all share. They just clicked when they lived on the same hall in freshman year and have stayed friends ever since.

He's also *ridiculous*, and even though he's pretty cute, Veronica is not surprised that he can't get a date - right up until he reveals that he already has one, and has had one for several years.

"My baby is coming to visit me next week," he tells them smugly when they're all having a sleepover in his and Lane's room. "So be *jealous*, because I'm getting laiiid." He wiggles his hips when he says it, causing Veronica to roll her eyes - until she realizes what he just said.

She sits up abruptly in Lane's bed, and beside her, Lane startles, too. Christian is sitting at the foot of Richie's bed, and he turns to stare at Richie incredulously.

"Your *baby*?" Christian asks for her. "Are you making up girlfriends now?"

Richie blinks at the three of them. "Wait. I didn't tell you?"

"You're dating someone?" Veronica knows it's probably mean that she sounds so alarmed, but to be fair, Richie has made a joke about blowing their biology prof at least four times a week since the start of term. She knows it's just jokes and that it's just how Richie is, but how can that kid also be in a long-term relationship?

"I've *been* dating someone since high school," he says bewildered. "Did I really not mention it?"

"No," Lane says emphatically. "Otherwise we wouldn't be losing our shit right now, fuck. What's her name?"

Richie blinks at them for several long minutes, and then his mouth curves up into a cheshire cat grin. Sometimes, Veronica hates him, and she feels it now more than ever. That face means he's *up to something*. "How about this," he says slyly. "I'll buy whoever can guess my baby's name dinner for a week. The game lasts until they come to visit."

"Why won't you just tell us?" Lane groans, and Richie shrugs. He doesn't have to say it, because they all know the answer: because it's funny. Then, Veronica realizes something.

"You said *they*," she points out, narrowing her eyes at him. "You're not gonna tell us what their gender is, either, are you?"

Richie beams at her. "Nica, you're so smart."

She throws herself backwards on Lane's bed. "I hate you," she says to the ceiling, and Richie cackles.

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"He'd tell us if it was a boy, wouldn't he?" Christian asks, pushing peas around on his plate. They're eating in the dining hall for once because most of them are out of cash, and today's fare is... not great. "He loves that gay shit; if he were dating a boy, he'd tell us."

"So it's probably a girl," Veronica summarizes, and she figures it's solid enough logic. "Can you even imagine what kind of person you'd

have to be to date *Richie* ?”

“He’s great, he really is,” Lane says glumly. “But he’s so difficult. God. She must have iron balls and a will of steel, honestly. He literally told us he was dating her by bragging about getting laid - c’mon.”

“He’s not exactly the classiest boy on the block,” Veronica agrees. “Seriously, I’m trying to picture what she might look like and it’s a *trip* .”

“She’s probably got her hair dyed red,” Christian snorts. “And wears fishnets with shorts.”

“Chokers,” Lane throws in. “So many chokers. *Dog collar* chokers.”

“Red’s not out there enough,” Veronica disagrees, snickering. “It’s probably green. Green hair, cut really short, and dog collars.” She lets out a huff. “The biggest punk I’ve ever seen.”

“She’ll have to be able to kick Richie’s ass, because god knows he’d drive her crazy if she didn’t,” Christian says, and Veronica snorts a laugh. Then, he softens. “And she’d probably have to be pretty great, because he’s crazy about her.”

Veronica’s smirk melts into a genuine smile. “She’s got him wrapped around her finger - I hope she knows it, whoever she is.”

“I don’t think she could miss it,” Lane snorts. “He’s pretty obvious... about everything.” She makes a face. He’s not wrong. “Still. If she loves him, too, I hope that shit works out.”

“I guess we’ll find out when we meet her,” Veronica says with a shrug, and that’s the end of that, at least for now.

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“Tell us about her,” Veronica demands one day. They’re all at Richie’s favorite coffee shop (because he demanded it), and Lane’s literally sleeping on the table in the corner while Christian works on an essay for his history class, so she doesn’t feel bad of commandeering the conversation. “This girlfriend of yours - tell us

about her."

Richie blinks at her, sitting across the table with a straw in his mouth. He always looks so damn shocked when she brings up his partner, as if she hasn't made it perfectly clear she's dying of curiosity and he's an ass for keeping vital information from her. "You can't trick me into telling you if it's a girl or a boy just by deciding it's one or the other," he says instead of answering, squinting at her. As if he needs to. The glasses aren't just for show.

She rolls her eyes. "Just tell me about her - or him. Jesus. It's not that hard; I just want to know more about this person you're so in love with."

Richie flushes a little bit, but it's a happy flush, so she doesn't feel bad. "They're amazing," he says promptly, and she's about to tell him that while that's great, it doesn't actually tell her a damn thing, but then he starts *rambling*, the way he only ever does over the Ramones or Black Sabbath. "And they're really nitpicky about stuff, but it's mostly cute, because it's always stupid shit that doesn't matter, but it matters to them. You know? And they wore fanny packs on the regular until junior year of high school, and it was so dumb, okay, but it was cute." He trails off, like he's thinking hard about something, but there's a soft smile on his face. It's probably the softest she's ever seen him look, ever. "And they listen to eighties pop music, because they're a *dork*, and they yell at me all the time but it doesn't stop them from loving me."

Veronica doesn't really think she's learned anything substantial about this mysterious partner of his, but she suddenly doesn't really feel the need to ask. He looks so happy, and she's distantly still grumpy about the secrecy, but she's no longer *mad* about it.

"Victoria," she says, and Richie frowns at her in confusion. "Keep up, Tozier - the name game. Is it Victoria?"

"... no." Richie's got this little smile turning his lips upward now, and she plays along.

"Arthur?"

“Nah.”

“David.”

“What do you take me for?”

“Denise?”

“Nope.”

“Bill?”

At that, Richie laughs out loud in genuine amusement. “No, hell no. I have a friend from back home named Bill, though, so don’t ever say that again.” He snickers about it some more, but Veronica just rolls her eyes and moves on. She doesn’t want to admit it, but she’s actually got a huge list of names stacked up, even if she’d thrown a fit about actually going along with his stupid scheme.

She continues giving him names, eventually just making up ridiculous ones just to make him laugh, and by the end of the night, she’s more or less let it go.

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Richie’s a very specific type of boy, Veronica thinks. The kind of boy who burns down kitchens accidentally and gets kicked out of Target for doing the macarena standing on the checkout counter because he was particularly fond of the song playing over the speakers. He’s one of those boys that you either love or hate, and if you love him, God help you, but he’ll make your life a million times better.

He’s also the kind of boy to wear the same shirt for a week straight and just style it with different Hawaiian print button-ups. Veronica’s pretty sure he only owns one pair of shoes - though his new job pays him more than enough to afford one more pair of Converse, Jesus - and there are some weeks he doesn’t even brush his hair. He’s kind of gross, sometimes, but she’s gotten used to him.

That’s why, as the date of Richie’s partner’s visit nears, she’s absolutely floored when he takes a shower and spends an hour combing his hair. “Gotta train it to stay down now, or it won’t on the

day of,” he explains, and he’s clearly nervous so she doesn’t call him on it, but she does look at him in alarm when he starts gathering his sheets and dirty laundry to take it to the laundry room. She’s pretty sure she’s seen him doing laundry himself once in all the time she’s known him. Once.

“Don’t you think you’re overdoing it a little?” Christian asks him when he actually borrows the vacuum from the RA and starts cleaning up the perpetual Cheeto dust from around his bed and desk area. “Just a little bit?”

Richie glares at him. She gets that he’s flustered, but it also doesn’t stop her from laughing a little at his indignant expression. “My honey was literally raised by their mother to think you can get gross lethal diseases from *anything* . If they see this mess, they’re not gonna step foot into our room. There is no overdoing it when you’re dating a Kaspbrak.” And then he goes right back to vacuuming.

“We have a last name,” Lane says dryly. “And now we know the girlfriend’s a hypochondriac. Great.” He throws his hands up and stalks out of the room, probably to go have a smoke outside.

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The big day arrives with no fanfare - except that Richie’s combed his hair four times since he’s gotten out of the shower (the second shower in as many days, which is unheard of), and that he keeps brushing his shirt like that’ll make it lay any flatter. Veronica’s tempted to call it cute, but she kind of hates to see him stress this bad, and wonders what kind of person his girlfriend is that seeing her makes Richie *nervous* .

He looks quite nice, actually - he’s got a button up underneath his clean and ironed Star Wars shirt, and while his Converse are still falling apart, he’s wearing matching socks underneath them. He’s got his good leather jacket over his shoulders, though it’s just draped there instead of actually on.

He gathers them all around noon, and says gravely, “The time has come.”



“Are we coming with you?” Lane asks with a raised eyebrow. He’s clearly not entertained by the theatrics, but Veronica’s kind of partial to them. Richie deflates.

“Yeah,” he sighs. “That’s kind of where I was going with that. They’re waiting for me at the park.”

Lane nods, but Christian stops them all. “Wait - what about the name game? Did anyone ever win?”

Richie’s nervousness melts away for the half a second he needs to smirk like an asshole. “Nope. And I don’t know why you’re even asking, the one time you guessed your guess was *Leia* , so.” He rolls his eyes.

He grumbles about it, but Veronica laughs at him and claps him on the shoulder before following Richie outside. They walk because the park’s barely ten minutes away and there’s no point in driving when it’s a comfortable sixty five degrees outside. She loves the fall, honestly. Richie chatters nervously the whole way there, nearly tripping over his own feet at least three times, and by the time they’re cool grass under their feet he’s just nibbling on his fingernails as they walk.

When they get to the meeting spot, Richie stops them. “Wait here?” He looks hesitant to ask, but Lane just snorts.

“Go have your fairytale reunion, dufus.”

Richie nods resolutely, spins on his heel, and tries to make his hair lie flat as he walks towards the bench facing the lake.

Veronica’s expecting the green-haired punk girl, but the kid sitting on the bench is about the exact opposite. It’s a boy with soft looking dark curls, swept carefully to the side, in an outfit that wouldn’t be out of place at Sunday mass. His braided leather belt matches his smart looking loafers almost exactly and there’s a sweater laying over his lap. He’s feeding the *ducks* , for Christ’s sake.

Veronica has a horrible thought occur to her. “Oh fuck,” she says as Richie approaches, more nervous than ever. She can see his long

fingers twisting in his hair instead of smoothing it down now. Lane looks over at her curiously. "What if that's her brother or friend or something and she sent him to break up with Richie for her?" she hisses, and Lane and Christian's eyes widen. "He looks so anxious!"

Lane examines the scene, and then the way the boys' eyes narrow at the sight of Richie. "Oh, fuck," he says, and for all his ribbing he looks genuinely upset on Richie's behalf. Veronica wants to cry a little.

But then the boy stands up and says something. His mouth is turned down, but his hands reach out to pull Richie's out of his hair. He fixes Richie's collar, then looks him up and down, still frowning. He says something, peering up into Richie's face.

"He's helping him get put together," Christian observes. "Maybe she's not here yet and sent him first so Richie doesn't think she bailed. Like, he could be just helping make sure Richie looks okay for her, since he's obviously stressed out about it."

"That's possible," Veronica starts saying, but then the stranger's face is morphing into something that approaches joy. He reaches up, presumably to smooth down Richie's hair himself, and instead twists his own fingers in the unruly curls before leaning up on his toes and pressing a kiss to Richie's mouth. It starts gentle and sweet, but then Richie palms at the boy's hips and over his lower back, pressing them together, and the boy easily shifts into grabbing at him, the kiss going deep.

Veronica's eyebrows disappear underneath her bangs. "Oh my god. That little Catholic boy is the girlfriend?"

Christian snorts at her phrasing, but he looks just as surprised. "Opposites attract, I guess?" But his time is one of pure amazement. "I thought for sure that kid was just here to say *she's giving you the boot, now scram.*"

"How the tables have turned," Lane says. He claps slowly. "Now I get the cleaning. Look at that kid; he'd probably cry if he got dirt on those shorts."

"He's wearing *loafers* ," Veronica snorts, and they devolve into snickers pretty quickly.

They're content to watch Richie and the mystery partner make out, but eventually Richie cuts it off and presses their foreheads together. He says something, and then they link hands to walk over to where Veronica, Lane, and Christian are standing.

"So, this is Eddie," Richie announces, and he's got that delighted grin on his face again, so Veronica feels okay about flashing Eddie a grin herself. Richie wraps an arm around Eddie's shoulder, whose arm goes around Richie's waist. They look really comfortable together. It's adorable.

"Welcome to shitland, mystery girlfriend," Veronica says. "Nice to finally know your name."

Eddie makes a confused sound, looking up at Richie, who doesn't bother to look anything but smug about it. "I made them try to guess your name," he explains. "I thought it would be funny, but none of them really tried except Veronica, so it was kind of lame."

Eddie rolls his eyes. Veronica likes the boy already. "You could have just told them, you know."

"But that wouldn't have been any fun," Lane says with an eye roll of his own. "We didn't even know he was seeing someone until he mentioned that he was gonna be getting laid."

Eddie's expression drops into something deadpan, but his arm is wrapped around Richie's waist still, so they're probably okay. "What a surprise," he says, one eyebrow arched. "Richie, talking about our sex life unnecessarily. How unusual."

"I only brought it up *once* when I came to visit," Richie protests - and oh, that must have been where he'd gone a couple months ago when he left for a week and a half. All the pieces are falling into place. That had actually been the first time she'd seen him do laundry himself.

Eddie is looking up at him exasperatedly. "Yeah, within two seconds

of meeting them. Honestly, you're such a sleezeball."

Richie looks mock offended for half a second, but Eddie's mouth twitches up into a grin and Richie can't hold the expression. He grins back, helplessly, and Veronica resists the urge to coo at him. "I'm *your* sleezeball, though," Richie says happily. Then, he gets that gleam in his eye. Veronica wants to warn Eddie, but the boy already has what seems to be an instinctual *don't you dare* face already going on. She remembers that they've been together since high school, and figures Eddie's probably well prepared for whatever he's about to say next. "And your mom's, of course. How is she? Does she miss me? I've missed her - her sweet, sweet -"

Eddie elbows Richie hard in the side. "Beep beep, Trashmouth," he says flatly. To their surprise, Richie just winces, rubbing his side with his free hand, and shuts up. "Anyway," he says to the rest of them, putting a winning smile on his face so quickly it's almost alarming. "Let's go find someplace to get coffee. I need a pick me up after that train ride."

They all quickly agree and set off, but Veronica notices that in spite of Eddie's seemingly annoyed expression, they're still holding onto each other like they'd be lost if they let go.

\*\*\*(Eddie's Campus)\*\*\*

Delany and the others quickly get used to having Richie around. By the spring semester, Richie's started making it a point to visit once or twice a month, and Eddie goes to see him regularly too. They don't kick Delany out of the room anymore - at least not more than a couple hour increments at a time - and Delany gets to spend every night playing board games with them and listening to them bicker. It's surprisingly fun, because Richie makes Eddie lively and chattery. They might fight a lot, but it's almost always in good fun.

Richie is a good addition to their friend group, which supprises everyone. Delany will admit that they made a snappy judgement of Richie because of his appearance, but they're making up for it now because they all love him. Oh, he's a notorious pain in the ass, but he's also good natured and clever, and pretty funny when he's not putting on ridiculous voices that Eddie says despairingly he's been

doing since middle school.

Mostly, he like the way he makes Eddie happy - because he does, in spite of their obvious differences and the way Richie makes jokes about Mrs. Kaspbrak (who hates him and throws fits whenever Eddie invites him to Sunday dinner with her). Eddie is always pretty cheerful, but around Richie he's just plain unreserved. He laughs louder and dances wilder, and he gets into crazy adventures. Not that Delany thinks it's a good thing that Richie got them thrown out of an Applebee's, but Eddie had come home nearly in tears from laughter. It's a good look on him.

They'd been judgemental at first - all of them had - but it's pretty obvious that Richie and Eddie are meant to be together. Delany would promise not to assume anything about Eddie or who he's into again, but... he's pretty sure there isn't going to be anyone else for either of them.

\*\*\**(Richie's campus)*\*\*\*

Veronica fucking *loves* Eddie Kaspbrak. For one thing, bringing the 'beep beep, Richie' to their attention has increased her quality of life by about twenty million percent, but even putting that aside, he's just a good guy. In spite of his uptight appearance, he's the voice of reason for all the weird shit they do and not a killjoy. He laughs at Richie's jokes, which makes Richie happy, and he's pretty funny on his own, though in a much less slapstick and more deadpan way.

The effect he has on Richie is incredible, she thinks - they're the kind of couple to take naps together and draw on each other's arms. Eddie calms him down and makes him soft, and it's really reassuring to see someone who brings that out in Richie. That's not to say they don't get rowdy - because they all do and having Eddie around doesn't mean they stop doing weird shit on the weekends, but at the end of the day Eddie helps Richie wind down, which is something he desperately needs.

Some days, they all wonder how Eddie puts up with him. On others, they wonder how Richie puts up with *Eddie* - the days where Eddie sneezes the wrong way and then refuses to leave Richie's bed, or the days that Eddie nags them over everything. They can both be moody

little shits honestly, but Veronica thinks they balance each other out okay. It's mostly Richie who's the pain in the ass, anyway, and they love him regardless. Eddie's known him long enough to have tolerance out the wazoo.

"I don't get it," Christian says dramatically one day, leaning across Richie's body to take Eddie's hand. "Why do you do this to yourself? You dear, sweet boy." Veronica snorts. She can't even blame him for asking, because right up until Richie had fallen asleep, leaning against Eddie's body where they were cuddling in bed to watch a movie, he's been off the *walls*. He'd been on his worst behavior all day, to the point that Veronica was sure Eddie would punch him - and that if Eddie didn't, someone else would.

But Eddie just laughs a little from where he's tucked under Richie's arm. "He's a handful," he says in a fond tone. He rarely uses it in front of Richie, but Richie knows how he feels, so it works out. "But he's my handful. I think it says good things about my patience and inner fortitude that I handle him so well."

It's a tease, and he kisses Richie's sleeping cheek afterward as if to make sure he knows that.

Veronica kind of wants to groan at how cute they are, but she just smiles instead and turns her head to watch the end of the movie. She'd had a lot of ideas about what kind of person would be best for Richie, but for once, she's glad to be wrong.